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ABSTRACT

Special education students who graduate or age-out of school are often not successful in making the transition from school to work. Transition services in Texas are grounded in federal civil rights legislation and a Texas Senate concurrent resolution which calls for preparing and supporting the successful transition of handicapped students to the adult world. Transition is defined, its goals outlined, and targeted special-needs students are specified. An Individual Transition Plan forms a written record of the student's long-range goals for employment and how they will be met. The Transition Plan should: outline programming and future opportunities; contain precise objectives and activities; have input from parents, students, educators, and adult service agencies; and be longitudinal in nature. The importance of cooperative efforts among members of the transition team is stressed. Several factors to be considered in implementing the transition plan are specified, such as residence requirements, leisure activities, medical and insurance needs, etc. Cooperative planning factors that facilitate or create barriers to the effective delivery of transition services are listed. The paper concludes with a list of eight transition task force goals. (JDD)

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TRANSITION: NEW CHALLENGE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

A primary purpose of the public school curriculum in Texas shall be to prepare thoughtful, active citizens who understand the importance of patriotism and can function productively in a fee enterprise society with appreciation for the basic democratic values of our state and national heritage. TEC21.101

Productive citizenship is the end goal of education; therefore, ultimately, employment and community integration are measures of an educational program's success.

What happens to special education students who graduate or age-out of the public schools? The answer, too often, is "not much." Far too many, often end up sitting at home doing nothing.

Even students with mild handicaps who have had vocational experiences in high school are not always successful in making the transition from school to the adult world of work. Often the vocational skills they have developed in schools do not reflect the skills needed by the work force in their communities. And, even though such students may be successfully employed at graduation, if and when they lose their jobs, they often lack the skills to seek another job, or to know their resources for help in finding employment.

* The major portion of this introductory material was originally developed by The ESC-III Transition Advisory Committee which was adapted and adopted by the ESC-20 Transition Advisory Committee.

EC 202518

For those students with more severe handicaps, the outlook is considerably worse. All too often, the major emphasis in their schooling has been on acquiring developmental skills, not life skills; therefore, they leave the public schools lacking essential skills for independent living as well as vocational/employment skills. They return to home communities and look out the window, watching others enjoy productive lives. Self-concepts suffer and society suffers; taxpayers must support this vast wasteland of human potential. The U. S. Department of Education reported that in 1986 as many as 57-85% of all disabled people of work age were unemployed.

The situation is critical. The Harris Survey of 1985 reported to Congress that of 1,000 persons with handicaps, 67% were not working, while 3/4 of those who were working, worked part time for low wages. Research, however, in the vocational training of special-needs students reveals that if vocational competencies and skills for independence are focused on early enough within the curriculum, and appropriate transitional planning and support are available, this negative outcome can be turned around.

Transition is grounded in civil rights' legislation of the 70's. Federal laws, in place and supportive of transition issues, include the following: 1973 Rehabilitation Act, section 503/504 providing equal employment/educational/housing rights for people with disabilities and providing 10% set

aside funds for vocational education of the disabled; 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act(PL 94-142), guaranteeing free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment for handicapped children of all types; and Career Education Act, providing focus on career education in schools for all students, including those with handicapping conditions. In 1983 Congress passed the Secondary Education and Transitional Services for Handicapped Youth Program, the purpose of which was to assist disabled youth in the transition from secondary school to post-secondary environments of competitive or supported employment. There is currently a national focus on improving the transition of handicapped students led by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in Washington (OSERS).

Texas has responded to this challenge through Senate Concurrent Resolution 129 which calls for leadership/coordination from the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation and The Texas Rehabilitation Commission in preparing/supporting the successful transition of handicapped students to the adult world. The Interagency Agreement for the Provision of Statewide Transitional Services, signed in March 1987 by commissioners of these agencies, (see appendix) insures that transition is a state commitment to improve services/service coordination for Texas' handicapped students leaving the public schools. In assuming its responsibilities, the Texas Education Agency

has directed each Education Service Center to provide leadership in developing a Regional Transition Plan, working cooperatively with appropriate agency representatives. This product is a starting point of the initial results of that cooperative effort.

TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK*

Transition Defined

The transition from school to adult life is an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional post-secondary education or adult services and the initial years of employment. Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the secondary school and the opportunities and risks of adult life. Transition from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of leaving school and secure opportunities and services in adult situations.

The goals of transition include: to arrange for opportunities and services that will support quality adult living, to prevent the interruption of needed services, and to avoid institutionalization.

It features the following steps:

- ongoing focus within the curriculum on functional skills: daily living skills, personal-social skills, occupational skills, and academic skills;
- individual transition planning, including interagency cooperation/coordination;
- on going, follow-up services.

Transition issues target three types of special-needs students, according to functional level:

1. those disabled students who can achieve transition to post-secondary education or employment with no special help beyond that available from existing public school services, including career guidance, counseling, and job search assistance;
2. those who can make the transition with interim "time limited" services such as vocational rehabilitation, post-secondary vocational education, and other occupational training and supportive services; and
3. those who will need "supported employment" and community-based competitive job placement programs which combine, as needed, work opportunities with ongoing independent living services (Will, 1984).

The transition process should seek to maximize the productivity, community participation and independence of a special-needs student in leaving the school system. This process requires cooperative planning by several agencies whose roles and responsibilities will vary depending upon the needs of the student and upon the availability of services at the local level. The Individual Transition Plan is a written record of how the student's long range goals to employment will be met.

*Excerpts from: The Mainstream Facts

The Transition Plan

The Individual Transition Plan (ITP) must focus on those considerations which will have the most impact on the special needs student's successful independence in the community. The basic components of the plan should:

- .represent programming and future opportunities in four major areas: community living skills, social/leisure skills, residential living and vocational competence.
- .contain precise objectives, training activities, materials and resources, and evaluation strategies and that are individualized for the particular student.
- .have the involvement and input of parents/guardians and students.
- .include the input of educators and adult service agencies that will be involved in providing future services.
- .be longitudinal in nature and place priorities on the goals that will be needed in order to function successfully in post-school environments.

In addition, related professionals and evaluators will need to present information on how to ease the transition from school to work and adult life. The plan should:

- .be an extension of the student's IEP that includes long range goals
- .bring together all factors which influence the student's program decisions
- .combine efforts of parents, students, school personnel and adult service agencies
- .list specific objectives that help meet long range goals which lead to employment and
- .address the following considerations -- life skills, income support, work/vocational placement/continued education, transportation, advocate/guardian, insurance, medical needs, community leisure options, residential placement, etc.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Transition Plan should be jointly developed by members of the transition team. This team should include among others, the following: parents, student, vocational classroom teacher, guidance counselor, vocational specialist, administrator, vocational rehabilitation representative, employer, and community agency representatives. It is important to remember that no one single team member has sole responsibility for transition services to the special-needs student.

Implementing the transition process requires commitment and continued effort by all agencies involved in the transition process. The roles and responsibilities of the various agencies must be delineated in the local agreements.

Cooperative efforts among parents, the school and the community agencies must occur to ensure a continuum of services that will be coordinated to insure that services are not duplicated.

In addition, the parent and the employer should also take part in the transition process. Their roles are:

Parent

participates in development of IEP and individual transition plan (ITP); becomes knowledgeable about vocational opportunities and options; supports the student at home knows the services of various agencies investigates post-secondary training

Employer

cooperates by hiring students; provides cooperative sites; cooperates with vocational programs in updating

curriculum to meet labor market needs; investigates provides options for training sites; promotes on-the-job interpersonal skills, and promotes transition efforts in the community.

Other Agencies

provide information on financial benefits; provide support services i.e. drug abuse, counseling; provide information about medical or other available benefits and advocates interagency cooperation.

Implementing the Transition Plan

The Transition Teams should develop a transition plan for each handicapped student and those disadvantaged students identified as needing additional services. The transition plan should contain goals and objectives that will help the student secure those skills that will be needed in future environments.

The following items should be considered in developing individual transition plans.

.how the individual will support himself or herself

.where the individual will work

.where the individual will live

.does the individual need residential placement

.what the individual will do for fun and leisure

.how the individual will travel to and from home to work and other activities

.what medical needs will have to be met

.who will be the individual's advocate or guardian

.how the individual will develop and maintain friendships

.what long-term care will need to be provided

.how family contacts will be maintained

.what kind of insurance will be needed

.who will be involved in follow-up transitional planning

Other factors that should be considered in vocational planning include:

.the skills and preference of the individual student and family

.family values

.family resources and

.the appropriateness of local services.

The school representative (classroom teachers, vocational specialists, etc.) are primarily responsible for training the student for employment. The parents and adult service agency providers have the major responsibility of following up the transition plan once the student has graduated.

Facilitators/Barriers

Cooperative planning is necessary to insure that every student with special needs receives the transitional services that are needed. The interagency team members, effectively working together to achieve maximum development of a student's vocational potential, will possess the following characteristics:

.Team members explore all possible solutions and choose those solutions which will be most beneficial to special needs students.

.There is a constant desire to keep the commitments alive and to expand the interagency linkages to benefit special needs students.

.Ideas and strategies are shared between local and state level agencies.

.The interagency team encourages and supports local level service providers.

.A good community atmosphere exists towards the education and employment of special needs students.

.There is a desire to decrease the overlap of services provided to students.

.The objectives of the cooperating agencies are compatible.

.Agencies have a referral system which sends clients to the agency with the best resources to help that individual.

Barriers to interagency collaboration on the local level that can bring about ineffectiveness include:

.the roles and responsibilities of committee members are poorly understood

.lack of commitment on the part of team members

.poor communication among team members from different professional backgrounds

.feelings of territoriality or "turf protection" among team members

.new and different terminology used by various team members.

TRANSITION TASK FORCE GOALS

ESC REGION 20

The following goals were developed by the Region 20 Transition Task Force in response to the regional directive by the Texas Education Agency. The eight goals are task-analyzed into objectives with support activities, designations of agency responsibility for each activity, and timelines for implementation.

Goal #1 - Develop a model process to be adapted by school districts based on local needs for transitional programming for secondary students.

Goal #2 - Develop resource guides to transitional services.

Goal #3 - Assist the identification and implementation of relevant secondary curricula which would facilitate transition for mild, moderate and severely handicapped students.

Goal #4 - Encourage early and continued student/parental involvement in the educational and transition - planning process.

Goal #5 - Improve interagency communication/coordination to facilitate transition of handicapped students from school to adult post-school services as needed and work and living opportunities needed.

Goal #6 - Promote public awareness and provide the education needed to increase acceptance of handicapped persons as productive and employable members within the community.

Goal #7 - Expand community-based programs leading to employment and independent living opportunities for the handicapped student.

Goal #8 - Develop a follow-up services plan to track handicapped students for a period of one year after school departure/graduation.